

(Washington, DC)— Congresswoman Gwen Moore today decried the decision of the House Committee on Appropriations to remove Milwaukee's Zablocki VA Medical Center from a list of veterans medical facilities slated to receive funding for significant technological upgrades and structural refurbishments. Zablocki, a major veterans' facility in Wisconsin's Fourth Congressional District, had been placed on a priority list by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in February to receive \$32.5 million for a new Spinal Cord Injury Unit (SCI) in the 2007 budget.

"I am shocked and saddened that the Appropriations Committee has gone against the recommendations of the VA, of the Administration, and over half of the Wisconsin Congressional Delegation. The Administration placed Zablocki on a priority list to receive funding because the veterans at Zablocki are a priority," said Congresswoman Moore. "We're talking about our nation's veterans—heroes by any measure—who have lost the use of their legs and arms and often the ability to live independently. The least we can do for these veterans is honor their sacrifices by providing them with an up-to-date medical center to facilitate their healing and ensure their comfort."

Congresswoman Moore has vowed to work with Senator Herb Kohl, Ranking Member David Obey, and the rest of the Wisconsin delegation to reinstate the \$32.5 million in funding for the upgrade of Zablocki. In addition to offering an amendment to the upcoming FY2007 Military Quality of Life Appropriations bill, Moore will push for reinstatement of the funding in both the Senate's Military Construction and Veterans Affairs bill, as well as the final House-Senate appropriations conference report.

Congressman Obey, who serves as Ranking Member of the House Appropriations Committee, offered an amendment to reinstate the funding for Zablocki during the Committee's mark-up of the FY2007 Military Quality of Life Appropriations bill yesterday, after the GOP Chairman revealed that Zablocki had been stricken from the list of facilities that would receive an upgrade by the Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs Subcommittee. The amendment was defeated by a party-line vote.

In January, Congresswoman Moore sent a letter signed by Wisconsin delegation members Sen. Herb Kohl, Sen. Russ Feingold, Rep. Tammy Baldwin, Rep. Mark Green, and Rep. Ron Kind to VA Secretary R. James Nicholson in January expressing their strong support for the funding. The letter outlined the current operational capabilities of the medical center, as well as the dire need for upgrades and enhanced capacity. The \$32.5 million in funding requested in the letter

was included in the 2007 proposed budget released by the VA in February.

BACKGROUND ON ZABLOCKI MEDICAL CENTER

Zablocki Medical Center is the only VA unit that treats spinal cord injuries in Wisconsin, and only one of 23 in the United States, treating approximately 500 veterans as inpatients and providing service to 10,000 outpatients annually. The \$32.5 million in funding will improve patient care, maximize patient services and quality of life as it creates a new building that will include 38 patient beds. The new SCI unit will help thousands of veterans deal with irreversible paraplegia and quadriplegia, disabilities that are catastrophic to both veterans and their families.

The existing Spinal Cord Injury Unit at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center was established in 1972. The SCI unit is on two retrofitted acute care wards on the 10th floor of the Medical Center. Limitations of space and technology in the current location have made it impossible to keep the SCI unit abreast of the evolution of SCI medicine over the past thirty-three years. These facilities do not currently meet the current standards as set by JCAHO, the VA's space criteria, or the life and safety evacuation criteria. As of now, the SCI unit does not have rooms that were built to contain all the equipment needed by the veteran as he/she works to achieve optimal independence, and the unit's multi-patient rooms make it virtually impossible to meet expectations for patient privacy.

Even with the limited space and outdated technology, the SCI unit at Zablocki VA Medical Center boasts a very dedicated staff. The structural upgrades and new equipment afforded by this funding will bring Zablocki up to speed with the spatial and technology requirements that are needed to ensure that the staff can serve our veterans properly and more efficiently.

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